Impact.

المجلس الاسلامي
Islamic Council

6 June 1985

H E Mr Pham Wannamethee
Royal Thai Embassy
29 Queen's Gate
London SW7 5JB

Excellency,

The Islamic Council is deeply perturbed at the recent press reports about the Thai government's decision to coerce the Muslim citizens of Thailand in the Pattani Province to give up their Islamic names and take up in their place Thai Buddhist names. According to these reports, the decision of the Thai government, and the plan of action to implement it, is contained in a project document entitled: Proposal to Change Muslim Names to Thai Names Pattani Province 1985. The project document is signed by Mr Ta Keng Sak.

The strangest thing in the document is that the reason given for the need to replace Muslim names with Thai Buddhist names is "to avoid error in writing and reading when one applies for government documents". We are totally at a loss to understand as to why it is only in Thailand that errors are caused by Muslim names. As you are well aware several million UK citizens have Islamic names, Hindu names, Chinese names, Buddhist names, Russian names, Sikh names, Japanese names, and many more, yet there has never been any suggestion by the British government that this huge variety of foreign names has ever caused "errors in writing and reading when one applies for government documents". Similarly, the problem has never arisen in countries like France, Germany, Denmark, the USA, etc, whose citizens have many different ethnic origins and names.

Under the circumstances, Muslims all over the world cannot help thinking that the change of names is the first step in the Thai government's plan to obliterate the Islamic identity of its Muslim citizens. This is a gross violation of human rights and is bound to cause widespread reaction in the Muslim world.

I would therefore request Your Excellency to convey our feelings to your government, which we hope will reconsider its position on this matter. A reversal of the decision would not only be highly appreciated by the Thai Muslim community, but also by Muslims around the world. It would also raise the image of the Thai government as an enlightened and tolerant government with a good human rights record.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Salem Azzam (Secretary General)

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